

# **ANCESTRAL JOURNEYS END-OF-LIFE WISDOM IN TORAH & MIDRASH**

## ***JACOB'S DEATHBED FINALE: FAMILY DRAMA & TRAUMA AT THE END-OF-LIFE***

**REB SIMCHA RAPHAEL, PH.D.**

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## **JACOB'S DEATHBED FINALE: FAMILY DRAMA & TRAUMA AT THE END-OF-LIFE**

### **JACOB SPENT THE LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE IN EGYPT**

Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. [GEN. 47:28]

### **JACOB'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS HIS OWN DEATH**

When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried." "I will do as you say," he said. "Swear to me," he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. [GEN. 47:29-21]

### **ATUL GAWANDE, BEING MORTAL**

*Modern scientific capability has profoundly altered the course of human life. People live longer and better than at any other time in history. But scientific advances have turned the process of aging and dying into medical experiences, matters to be managed by health care professionals. And we in the medical world have proved alarmingly unprepared for it."*

### **JOSEPH'S ACCEPTANCE OF DEATH—LEARNED ATTITUDE FROM HIS FATHER**

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." [GEN. 50:24]

### **CONSCIOUS DYING—FINISHING BUSINESS, LIFE REVIEW, ETHICAL WILLS**

Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.' [GEN. 48:3-4]

As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem). [GEN. 48:7]

### **GETTING AFFAIRS IN ORDER—BURIAL PLOTS, ESTATE PLANNING, LIVING WILL**

Then [Jacob] gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite... There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." [GEN. 49:29-32]

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF BEREAVEMENT RITUALS

### JACOB DIES AND IS MUMMIFIED AND MOURNED BY THE EGYPTIANS

Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him. Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to mummify his father Israel. So the physicians mummified him taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for mummification. **AND THE EGYPTIANS MOURNED FOR HIM SEVENTY DAYS.** [GEN. 50:1-3]

ג וַיִּמְלְאוּ-לוֹ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם כִּי כֵן יִמְלְאוּ יְמֵי הַתְּנֻטִּים וַיָּבֶכּוּ אֹתוֹ מִצָּרִים שִׁבְעִים יוֹם

### EGYPTIAN MOURNING

*The entire mourning process took seventy days, exactly the time that the Egyptians mourned Jacob. But the most important part of the embalming process was the time the body spent drying out in the natron [a chemically-based embalming solution] the time specified for embalming in the Biblical passage quoted above. The Egyptians mourned Jacob from the moment he died until his mummy was complete, as they would mourn any Egyptian, because Jacob's mortuary treatment was completely Egyptian.* [Rachel S. Hallote, *Death, Burial, and Afterlife in the Biblical World*, p. 120]

### JOSEPH REQUESTS OF PHARAOH PERMISSION TO BURY JACOB IN CANAAN

When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh's court, "If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me. Tell him, 'My father made me swear an oath and said, "I am about to die; *bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan.*" Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.'" Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do." [GEN. 50:4-7]

### JACOB'S FUNERAL PROCESSION—AN EGYPTIAN RITUAL

So Joseph went up to bury his father.... When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and **THERE JOSEPH OBSERVED A SEVEN-DAY PERIOD OF MOURNING FOR HIS FATHER.** [GEN. 50:4-7]

*The transport of the body to the tomb took the form of a ritual procession normally beginning on the east bank of the Nile and crossing over on ferries to the cemeteries on the west ... Close to the mummy stood two women impersonating the divine mourners Isis and Nephthys ... then followed by groups of mourning women ... As the bier neared the tomb it was greeted by ritual dancers as a lector-priestess read from a funerary papyrus in honor of the deceased.*

[A.J. Spencer, *Death in Ancient Egypt* pp. 51-52]

### “GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE”—ENTERING THE REALM OF THE ANCESTORS

When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and **WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE.** [GEN. 49:33]

